



---

## Black History Month 2010

29 January 2010

### **Black History Month Honors Legacy of Struggle and Triumph**

#### **Theme for 2010 is "The History of Black Economic Empowerment"**

By Louise Fenner, Staff Writer

Washington — Each February, Black History Month honors the struggles and triumphs of millions of American citizens over the most devastating obstacles — slavery, prejudice, poverty — as well as their contributions to the nation's cultural and political life.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau there are more than 41 million black residents in the United States, including those of more than one race. They make up 13.5 percent of the U.S. population.

In 2009, the inauguration of Barack Obama, America's first African-American president, lent Black History Month a special significance. Obama took the oath of office January 20, the day after Americans honored the memory of Martin Luther King Jr. with a federal holiday and national day of service.

In his inaugural address, Obama acknowledged the historical importance of a moment in which "a man whose father less than 60 years ago might not have been served at a local restaurant can now stand before you to take a most sacred oath."

#### **HONORING ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF BLACK AMERICANS**

Black History Month was the inspiration of Carter G. Woodson, a noted scholar and historian, who instituted Negro History Week in 1926. He chose the second week of February to coincide with the birthdays of President Abraham Lincoln and the abolitionist Frederick Douglass.

The celebration was expanded to a month in 1976, the nation's bicentennial. President Gerald R. Ford urged Americans to "seize the opportunity to honor the too-often neglected accomplishments of black Americans in every area of endeavor throughout our history."

Woodson, the son of former slaves in Virginia, realized that the struggles and achievements of Americans of African descent were being ignored or misrepresented. He founded the Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH), which supports historical research, publishes a scholarly journal and sets the theme for Black History Month each year.

**The theme for 2010, "The History of Black Economic Empowerment,"** recognizes the lives of successful black men and women such as Madame C.J. Walker, founder of a beauty empire in the early 20th century and the first African-American woman to make \$1 million. (See "New Exhibition Celebrates Women Who Challenged and Changed U.S.")

This year ASALH is celebrating the centennial of the National Urban League, which was founded in New York City in 1910 by a group of dedicated reformers, both black and white, who wanted to address the needs of African Americans as they migrated northward to escape economic, social and political oppression in the South.

## **Embassy of the United States of America Khartoum, Sudan**

John Fleming, ASALH president from 2007 to 2009 and director emeritus of the Cincinnati Museum Center, said Obama's heritage — a black father born in Kenya and a white mother born in the United States — "continues to reflect the contributions Africans and Europeans have made to American history from the very beginning."

Fleming said he believes Black History Month should focus on positive as well as negative aspects of the black experience. "Certainly, struggle has been an ongoing theme in our history from the very beginning. However, we were not slaves prior to being captured in Africa — and while slavery was part of our experience for 250 years, we have a hundred-and-some years in freedom that we also need to deal with."

He said he has seen "substantial progress on many fronts," but "at the same time there are still major problems that have to be addressed, one being the permanent underclass in urban areas now. We don't seem to be able to break that cycle of poverty. And there are still some major rural pockets of poverty" such as in the Mississippi Delta.

"I'm glad to see the National African American Museum being developed on the Mall, which will tell a much broader story," said Fleming. In 2003, President George W. Bush signed legislation to establish the new museum, which will be located on the National Mall near the Washington Monument. Although the new museum has not yet been built, it launched a photo exhibition at the National Portrait Gallery late in 2007 that is traveling to museums around the country through 2011. (See "African Americans' Struggles, Triumphs Shown in Photo Exhibition.")

"I think that African-American history gets more attention during February than during any other time of year," Fleming said, "and I think it's an opportunity for us in the field to emphasize that it is something that should be studied throughout the year."

Each year, the U.S. president honors Black History Month, or African-American History Month as it is also called, with a proclamation and a celebration at the White House. States and cities hold their own events around the country, and media feature topics related to black history.

ASALH has its headquarters in Washington, where Woodson lived from 1915 until his death in 1950. His home is designated a national historic site.

Also see People & Places on *America.gov*, "Museum Seeks to Document the African-American Experience," and Census Bureau facts for Black History Month on the Census Bureau Web site

More information on the Association for the Study of African American Life and History and the National Urban League is available on their Web sites.

Source: <http://www.america.gov> (Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State)

**Embassy of the United States of America**  
**Khartoum, Sudan**

For further information, please contact the U S. Embassy's Public Affairs Section  
ولمزيد من الاستفسار، المرجو الاتصال بمكتب الشؤون العامة بالسفارة الأمريكية بالخرطوم على الهواتف  
at 0183-774-700